

SUPERBASE 1

NELLIS

The Home of 'Red Flag'



George Hall

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Front cover Is it possible to
imagine an airbase without the F-4
Phantom? This F-4E is normally
based at George AFB, California
where it serves with the 37th TFW

Title pages An F-16 Fighting Falcon
on long final to Nellis against the
warm colours of the mountains in
the background

Gothscans Ltd



Introduction

In the skillet-hot desert north of Las Vegas, Nevada, the US Air Force plays for keeps. Nellis Air Force Base is the most active Tactical Air Command base in the United States, sitting on the edge of a 3-million-acre aerial range where just about anything goes. Its long-time nickname is acknowledged throughout the Air Force: 'home of the fighter pilot.'

Nellis affords the modern jet pilot all the airspace he could want to turn, burn, and even go supersonic in an effort to get on his adversary's six o'clock. The desert weather (if you can withstand the heat) is another big plus—330 days of CAVU (clear air, visibility unlimited) flying every year. The big base was established as a World War 2 training field and was later named after a Las Vegas native, Lt Bill Nellis, who died in a dogfight over Germany in 1944.

No American base boasts a wider range of resident units and fascinating activities. The Fighter Weapons School, a scholarly Air Force version of the Navy's Top Gun, is headquartered here along with its own stable of F-5, F-15, F-16, F-111, A-10, and T-38 aircraft. Next door are the 64th and 65th Aggressor Squadrons, professional bad guys who are schooled in the emulation of the aerial tactics of potential enemies around the globe. Another hangar down are the Thunderbirds Air Demonstration Squadron, now flying red-white-and-blue F-16 Falcons in dazzling aerobatic displays around the country.

And there's more. A whole wing of F-16s almost gets lost in the shuffle at Nellis; at any other TAC base they would be the centrepiece. And four times a year Nellis plays host to Red Flag, a six-week mock air war between players from the Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and NATO forces. Every two years the mile-long ramp is swelled with 90 jets competing in Gunsmoke, an Air Force-wide gunnery and

bombing competition. Other units on the base organize and administrate all this frenetic activity, including air wars and bombing runs over a desert range bigger than many European countries.

So slap on your No 12 sunscreen, and we'll take a tour of the flight line to see what's doing. A word to the wise: don't even think of visiting Nellis without extensive prior permission. It's a highly secure base, and even VIP visitors are escorted every step of the way by base public affairs personnel. Special thanks to our escorts and guides, who often went beyond the call of duty in Nevada's 110-degree weather: Maj Andy Andrijauskas, Sgt Chris Miller, Capt Barry Anderson, Red Flag's Col Doug 'Zip Gun' Nelson, and Maj Mike 'Boa' Straight of the Fighter Weapons School. Let's do it... .

George Hall has been photographing and writing about American military aircraft for twenty years. He's accumulated thousands of photo hours in over a hundred different military and civilian aircraft types—everything from blimps to the hottest Mach 2 fighters. His other books include: *CV: Carrier Aviation* (Presidio Press); *USAFA: A Primer of Modern Air Combat in Europe* (Presidio Press); *Red Flag: Air Combat for the Eighties* (Presidio Press); *Marine Air: First to Fight* (Presidio Press); *Top Gun: The Navy Fighter Weapons School* (Presidio Press); and *Total Force: Flying with America's Reserve And Guard* (Thomasson-Grant).

Photographs were taken exclusively with Nikon cameras and lenses ranging from 16 mm fisheyes to 500 mm telephotos. With few exceptions, the film of choice is Kodachrome 64 slide film.

Right The mighty Republic F-105 Thunderchief enjoyed a brief but spectacular career with the Thunderbirds Air Demonstration Squadron between 1964–65. One of their specially modified B models is preserved at Nellis AFB

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Weapons School

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The Thunderbirds

Left Immaculate Thunderbirds, immaculate parking. The team received their strikingly painted F-16s in 1982. **Below** The fine lines of the F-5E Tiger II stand out against the Thunderbirds' hangar







Below Thunderbirds' crewmen stand to attention as each F-16 heads for the runway. **Left** Polished to perfection, a four-ship of glinting Thunderbirds lifts off





This page: Thunderbird No 4 slips neatly into the slot position as the formation climbs out. **Right** Smoke's on as the Thunderbirds pass in review, their station-keeping as precise as you'll ever see





This page A happy aerial
carrying out its mission in
conventional painting over the sand.
Right Thunderbird No. 1 in a camo-
painted F/A-18 which is used for press
and VIP flights. *Courtesy: USAF*



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Air Guard A-7s

Gunsmoke 1987, the US Air Force's biennial weapons meet. These competitors are from the 120th TFS, 140th TFW, Colorado ANG. Each team brings four aircraft plus one spare





Above A custom-painted baggage blivet on a Grumman A-10. The Guard unit shocked the active Air Force by winning Gunsmoke's 'Top Gun' award in 1981. Far right A member of the exclusive "Squadron ANG's Men's Hot Metal Club"; it's hard to believe that the Colorado ANG's spotless Corsairs are nearly 30 years old. Interestingly, the Air Force never officially adopted the Corsair II nickname for its A-10s; all of 470 D models were produced by Vought.





A-7Ds of the 112th TFS, 180th TFG,
Ohio ANG, take on liquid oxygen at
Gunsmoke 1987





The A-7D has 35 access panels, 90 per cent of which can be reached without an aircraft stand. US Air Force units gave up their A-7s to the Air Guard following the introduction of the Fairchild A-10A Thunderbolt II in the mid-1980s

Intruder

Red Flag players often include Navy and Marine Corps assets. Looking rather conspicuous against the desert, these A-6E Intruders are from attack squadron VA-98 'Green Lizards' in Washington State





Skyhawk

Marine Corps' A-4M Skyhawks of VMA-311 'Tom Cats' from MCAS El Toro, California repose on the Red Flag ramp. No matter what you call it (*Heinemann's Hot Rod, Scooter, Bantam Bomber or Tinker Toy Bomber*), the Skyhawk remains an effective attack aircraft. The Marines also employ the two-seat OA-4M for fast forward air control work. Inset Close-up of 25-lb practice bombs on a Marine A-4M







Warthogs

Main picture Lined up on the concrete, these gunslingers hail from the 354th TFW at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. **Inset** From concrete to baked desert: an A-10 Warthog gets a tactical combat reload of its mighty 30 mm seven-barrel anti-tank cannon on the dry bed of Texas Lake in the Nellis Range. **Far inset** A new twist, seen at Gunsmoke 1987, is this interesting smoke deflector on the business end of the Avenger cannon





Warthogs as far as the eye can see
(well, almost). Natty covers protect
the A-10's two 9065 lb (4112 kg)
thrust GE TF34-100 turbofans against
foreign object damage (FOD)





354TH

This photograph captures a row of F/A-18 Hornets parked on a runway under a clear blue sky. The aircraft are positioned in a staggered formation, with the lead plane's nose pointing towards the left. The most prominent aircraft in the center has a large circular tail code on its vertical stabilizer that reads "354TH". To the right of this aircraft, another tail code is visible with the letters "FW". The aircraft are a light grey color, and the runway surface is visible beneath them.



The A-10 hits hard and can carry a total ordnance load of 16,000 lb (7257 kg), but this example is using only one of its eleven pylons to carry a captive Maverick air-to-surface missile for training purposes. In wartime, the aircraft would be festooned with bombs, Mavericks, jamming pods and even Sidewinder air-to-air missiles for self-defence





Above This A-10 came from the 343rd TFW, Alaskan Air Command to compete in Gunsmoke 1987.
Right Another 343rd TFW machine undergoes the trial of a tactical engine change

Below This 600 US Gal (2273 lit) drop tank was removed from a 25th TFS A-10 which arrived at Nellis from its home base at Suwon in South Korea







MB
354 TFW
AF 101
79



A-10 fin flashes: the identity of the machine at far left is self-evident, while the AK tail code tells us that this Warthog belongs to the 21st TFW at Eielson AFB. Note the Suwon-based A-10 in the background



A Nellis-based A-10 of the 57th FWW prepares for engine start on the Red Flag ramp. Right Much later, carrying an electronic countermeasures pod under the left wing, another 57th FWW A-10 slips into Nellis at sunset







Phabulous Phantoms

Left F-4s didn't look this good when they rolled out of the factory 20 years ago! This absolutely pristine F-4E is from the 37th TFW at nearby George AFB, California. Note the 'Spook' on the intake cover

Top RF-4C reconnaissance Phantom visiting from the 67th TRW at Bergstrom AFB, Texas. The RF-4C is 4 ft 8 ins (144 cms) longer to accommodate the cameras, extra radar gear and other equipment.
Above Close-up of the ALO-119 jamming pod carried on the left inboard pylon



Right The RF-4C is extremely sophisticated and demands careful maintenance. A technician adjusts the 'wiggly amps' in the APQ-99 terrain-avoidance/mapping radar

Main picture F-4E Phantoms of the 4th TFW, Seymour-Johnson AFB, North Carolina, stand ready for the next Gunsmoke event. **Far inset** This example has been busy with its 20 mm M61A1 Vulcan cannon









These pages A walk-around sequence devoted to an F-4E Phantom of the 37th TFW. The F-4E first flew in June 1967 and remained in production at St Louis until 1979



Canopy to canopy: the main picture reveals what Air Force Phantoms look like when they aren't competing in Gunsmoke! **Below** A crewman from the 37th TFW touches up the paintwork on the canopy rail of an F-4E







A photograph showing a row of fighter jets lined up on a runway. In the foreground, the front halves of several aircraft are visible, including F/A-18 Hornets with red tails and F/A-18 Hornets with blue tails. Behind them, the rear sections of more jets are visible, some with red tails and others with blue tails. The background is a hazy, light-colored sky.

Typical hustle at Nellis: Gunsmoke
Phantoms taxi out, practising
Thunderbirds taxi in, and an F-16 of
the Fighter Weapons School blasts
off in full afterburner



This page The smart air defence grey camouflage is a world away from the original tactical warpaint once worn by this old warrior, an F-4D of the 924th TFG, Texas Air National Guard

Far right Weasel bird: slats, flaps and gear all down, an F-4G SAM-suppression aircraft comes in on final. The J79-17 engines fitted to the F-4G are not supposed to trail tell-tale smoke







These pages A clever variation on the 'Egypt One' air defence camouflage scheme enhances the classic lines of this immaculate F-4D Phantom, which is operated by the 160th TFS, Alabama Air National Guard from Donnelly Field. The AAA-4 infrared detector, originally housed in the pod under the radar, is no longer fitted to the F-4D and has been replaced by an electronic warfare package. In the light of Vietnam experience the F-4E introduced an M61 gun fitted in the nose, but other Phantoms (except the *Luftwaffe* F-4F and the F-4EJ built in Japan) have to rely on a podded version of the gun carried under the belly, as here. Polishing is clearly a way of life in the Guard, as illustrated by the gleaming tail of F-4D 66-575 (above)



More than 20 Phantoms are visible in this Nellis ramp shot. Despite the introduction of the F-14, F-15, F-16 and F/A-18, US forces still utilize around 2000 F-4s in a variety of roles. Thanks to Mitsubishi in Japan, Phantom production reached 5201 before the line finally closed in 1981. In common with US operators, many foreign air forces are investing in series of upgrade programmes to keep the McDonnell fighter operational into the 21st century





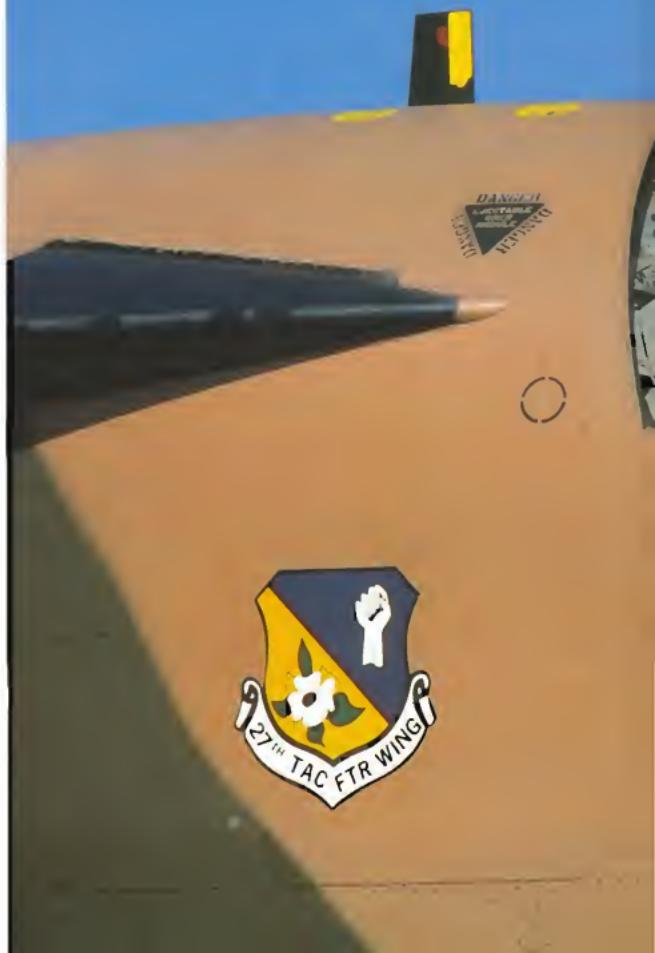




Phantom dawn: a Marine Corps' F-4S is readied for a Red Flag hop at first light. The Marines are not expected to trade in their last F-4s for F/A-18s until the 1990s

Aardvarks

Although rarely used, the F-111 can accommodate an M61 Vulcan cannon in the bomb bay. This example has chalked up some 20 mm strafing time on the Red Flag Range. The colourful badge on the side of the fuselage confirms that this is an F-111 of the 27th TFW at Cannon AFB in New Mexico





CARTS INST

CHIEF INST CHIEF CO. NO. 1



Above and right The F-111 is an impressive aircraft, with a span (wings fully spread) of 63 ft (19.2 m), and is some 73 ft 6 in (22.4 m) long. The E model is powered by a pair of P&W TF-30-3 turbofans each developing 19,600 lb (8891 kg) of thrust with afterburner. With the exception of the EF-111A electronic warfare variant, all F-111 models are in the Mach 2-plus class at

altitude and can cruise automatically on the deck at 571 mph (919 km/h) during ingress to the target. Approaching the target area, however, the afterburners will be lit to push the Aardvark to near supersonic speed to achieve maximum surprise and (with luck) avoid being engaged by the defences



Left A Cannon-based F-111 carrying a Cubic Corporation ACMI pod for transmission of aerial data to computers on the ground. ACMI stands for Air Combat Manoeuvring Instrumentation: with this system an aerial engagement can be viewed in computer simulation on the ground or taped for later debrief by the pilots



The Aardvark tends to look ungainly from head-on. This view, together with the close-up on page 59, reveals the complex intake/wing geometry of the aircraft—especially the full-span slot along the leading edge and the glove vane and pivot junction configured for the minimum sweep position. The weapon pylons pivot as the wing sweeps back







These pages The 'Crusaders' of the 523rd TFS are one of the F-111 squadrons attached to the 27th TFW at Cannon



This page A Cannon-based F 111 turns onto final approach as the pilot backs off on the power and sets up for a landing. **Right** Burnside glowing, an F 111 Eagle from Holloman AFB, New Mexico heads off to mix it with a strike package. An F 111F of the 48th TFW based at RAF Lakenheath in Great Britain makes the long journey to the runway. The F model is generally regarded as the best F 111 ever built.





BUFFs

The B-52 isn't just a Big Ugly Fat Fellow, it's a heavy smoker, too. Red Flag exercises involve every imaginable tactical asset in their mock warfare scenarios. A B-52G pollutes the atmosphere as it leaves Nellis to fly an attack mission over the imaginary Red Flag battle lines.





00





Powered by its eight P&WA J57 turbojets each generating 13,750 lb (6,237 kg) of thrust, the B-52G on the preceding pages continues its climb from Nellis. Note the bulges of the EVS (Electro-optical Viewing System) under the nose, a retrofit designed to improve target penetration in bad weather. **Right** Another B-52G departs from Nellis. The pilot's aren't wasting any time: retraction the gear, the straggers are already up and the nose is just pivoting into the down position. Boeing built a total of 192 G models.





Red Flag

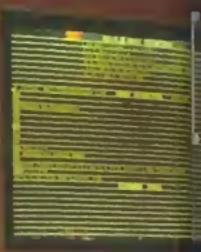
Above Red Flag exercises are organized four times a year by the staff of the 440th Tactical Fighter Training Group in this building

Right Crew patch of the 57th Fighter Weapons Wing, parent unit of the Red Flag and Aggressor squadrons

Main picture Each Red Flag mission, with as many as 70 aircraft over the range simultaneously, is preceded by a mass briefing in the Red Flag auditorium









The range control centre—code name 'Blackjack'—has absolute control over every Red Flag hop



This computer map of the Red Flag range displays the real-time location and squawk number of each participating aircraft in the exercise.



The Aggressor pilots, flying on the 'red' or enemy side of the Red Flag war, are controlled by their own combat air controllers from one corner of the 'Blackjack' command centre



Ground threat radars, many of them mimicking the capabilities of Soviet anti-aircraft systems, bombard the Red Flag attackers with realistic emissions as they attempt to carry out their missions. Right An Air Force A-7K two-seater makes a 500-knot, 100-foot pass over a threat radar installation in the Nellis range







Preceding pages A pilot's eye view of the Nellis runways with the flight line to the right. The Red Flag portion of the ramp is at the top of the picture. **These pages** A C-9 Nightingale hospital jet follows a Fighter Weapons School F-16 out for takeoff. Las Vegas is in the distance.







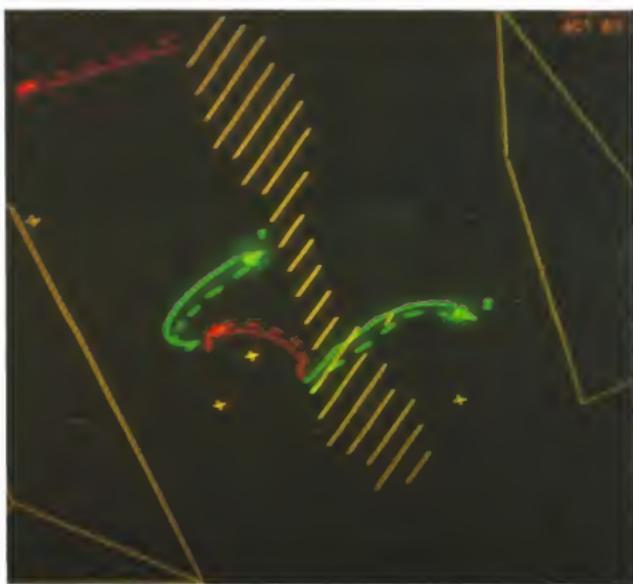


A tiny portion of what is thought to be the world's largest patch collection in the parachute riggers' shop at Nellis. Hundreds of ultra-rare World War 2 patches are on display. Donations gladly accepted!



USAF Fighter Weapons School

Top left Headquarters of the Fighter Weapons School at Nellis. **Below and top right** The 64th and 65th Aggressor Squadrons work closely with the Fighter Weapons School as they simulate Soviet fighter tactics in their Northrop F-5E Tiger IIs. The F-5E is a small and simple fighter which has a performance envelope similar to the Mikoyan MiG-21 *Fishbed*. The Aggressors sport Soviet-style piped nose numbers and a wide variety of Eastern European and Third World camouflage schemes. **Bottom right** Detail of the Air Combat Manoeuvring Instrumentation system as it portrays a 2 v 2 dogfight.









Preceding pages Multi-coloured Aggressors lined up on the ramp; the lofty control tower is visible on the right of the main picture



These pages The F-SE has a punch in the nose (left) in the form of two 20 mm M-39A2 cannons with 280 rounds apiece. For training, a captive Sidewinder round is usually carried on the left wingtip for acquisition purposes. Aggressor F-SEs also fly with ACMI data transmission pods (below left, in foreground). The wide track of the Tiger II's main gear is seen to advantage in this picture. The Aggressor squadrons are highly desired flying slots, and only the hottest Air Force fighter talent need apply. An Aggressor pilot gets set for an ACM mission (inset)







Preceding pages Aggressors take off to rendezvous over the range

These pages A rare opportunity to compare the contrasting colour schemes of the Aggressors in flight. This four-ship formation would be too unwieldy in a combat situation, so before the fight begins the formation will split into pairs for maximum flexibility and to minimize the risk of being spotted by a wary opponent





Eager Eagles

Main picture The twin tails of a key Red Flag player, an F-15 Eagle of the 33rd TFW out of Eglin AFB, Florida. **Below** Nose well up, a 33rd TFW Eagle bleeds off speed on final



G
AFFI







The 33rd TFW is equipped with the F-15C, the first example of which first flew on 26 February 1979. Compared to the A model the F-15C has a greatly expanded radar detection/tracking capability, detail structural improvements to reduce complexity and weight, a large increase in both internal and external fuel capacities and considerably more multi-mission operability. Despite the new kid in fightertown in the shape of the F-16, the Eagle is still regarded by many as the ultimate assignment for any self-respecting fighter pilot.

These pages Canopy polishing is no mere ritual, but an important part of preflight preparation: there are no marks for mistaking a bug for the bad guy





An Eagle driver gets under his
Stetson to protect his noggin from
the three-digit heat common at
Nellis



A returning Eagle displays the standard air combat training configuration of a Cubic data transmission pod and a Sidewinder acquisition round



Below The AIM-9P Sidewinder is the Eagle's standard short-range air-to-air missile, an infrared heat-seeker with an optimum range of about 3 miles (4.8 km).



Right Close-up of a capable Sidewinder missile and a Cupid gear launcher (nearest camera) fitted to an F-104. The aircraft has lost its original fairings for the semi-controlled cruise of the medium-range target dragger station.

Bottom One of the stations can be seen under the intake.





A perfect Eagle formation streaking the landing
break over the Nellis runway



Birds of prey, the nearest Eagle is painted in a prototype 'Europe One' camouflage scheme, similar colouration will soon be seen on the first production F/A-18E Strike Eagles

Fighting Falcons

These F-16s are well protected. Heavily-armed guards patrol the flight line; wander around without the proper authorization and escort, and you'll soon be licking the concrete. The red line symbolizes the fence that encloses flight lines at front-line tactical bases. All personnel and visitors must treat the red line as if it is a real fence—access to the flight line is allowed only at checkpoints about 100 metres apart. Anyone stepping over that little red rope will be arrested. No kidding.









Main picture and inset Nellis hosts an entire F-16 wing in the 474th TFW. The unit badges of the wing's three squadrons adorn the commanding officer's F-16C

Above Detail of *City of North Las Vegas* and *Vegas 1*, both F-16s with the 474th TFW



An F-16 makes a low afterburner getaway from Nellis (left of picture) as the lights and puffs of Las Vegas twinkle and fade in the gathering darkness.





An F-16 from Homestead AFB, Florida holds off as it prepares to land after a Red Flag hop. The aircraft is carrying combat tanks, Sidewinders and an ALQ-119 jammer





These F-16s came from Kunsan in South Korea to compete in Gunsmoke 1987. They belong to the 8th TFW



Some F-16 units have chosen to decorate their mounts with a stylized 'Fighting Falcon' motif



Main picture Viper 5 of the 8th TFW sported a neat line in travel pods—his luggage obviously travels first class. **Far Left** Detail of the vertical stabilizer of 81-714, 8th TFW



Line up of F-16 Fighting Falcons of the 419th TFW, Air Force Reserve, based at Hill AFB, Utah







HL

388TH TFW

AF 82 950

HL
388TH T



Falcon tail feathers: 388th TFW, Hill AFB (main picture); 31st TFW, Homestead (inset); and 169th TFG, McEntire ANGB, South Carolina Air National Guard (above)



ANG
BUCKLEY ANGB, CO



40 TFW

TEAM TOTAL **8771**

BOX	TAC	NAV	
PATN	PATN	ATTK	TOTAL

728 675 650 2053

PHILLIPS 748 431 817 1996

SPADA 705 586 848 2139

SKIFF

723 719 852 2294

STEPHENSON 736 570 828 2134

WICKSTROM 751 555 786 2092

HUNTER

621 690 884 2195

DONISI 695 589 880 2164

SHRADER 696 676 832 2204

WAITTE

719 642 868 2229

HOY 722 678 820 2220

WIEBENER 797 501 880 2178

THOMAS

SANDERS

SCHWAB

SENSENEY

AD 2445 MAINT 6363

WPNS LOAD 2860 MAINT 6397

WPNS LOAD 2794 MAINT 6421

WPNS LOAD

PACAF
SUWON AB, KOREA



51 TFW

TEAM TOTAL **8514**

BOX	TAC	NAV	
PATN	PATN	ATTK	TOTAL



81 TFW

TEAM TOTAL **8613**

BOX	TAC	NAV	
PATN	PATN	ATTK	TOTAL

SPADA 705 586 848 2139

SKIFF

WICKSTROM 751 555 786 2092

HUNTER

SHRADER 696 676 832 2204

WAITTE

WIEBENER 797 501 880 2178

THOMAS

SCHWAB

SENSENEY

WPNS LOAD 2794 MAINT 6421

WPNS LOAD

USAFE
RAF BENTWATERS, UK



TEAM TOTAL

NSMOKE 87

ANG
BRADLEY ANGB, CT
A-10

TFG
TOTAL 8298
TAC NAV
PATN ATK TOTAL

1562 8322112

0483 8472080

1513 882 2079

596 710 2027

7 MAINT 6418

LEADER BOARD AS OF 15 OCT

OVERALL

TOP TEAM	TOP GUN
388TFW	HAMILTON 419 TFW

CATEGORY

TOP TEAM	TOP GUN
37 TFW	F-4 BREWER/ LAVELLE 37TFW
121 TFW	A-7 MCDAVID 140 TFW
81 TFW	A-10 HOY 51 TFW
388TFW	F-16 HAMILTON 419 TFW
WPNS LOAD	MAINT
51 TFW	926 TFG



343 TFW

TEAM TOTAL 7818

BOX	TAC	NAV
PATN	PATN	ATTK
TOTAL		



354 TFW

TEAM TOTAL 8260

BOX	TAC	NAV
PATN	PATN	ATTK
TOTAL		

MCHENRY 676 459 860 1995 ARMSTRONG 664 636 685 1

JACKSON 686 466 788 1940 HICKS 641 615 710 1

EMERSON 732 449 664 1845 BARTLEY 750 689 691 2

BALL 689 571 778 2038 FLOUER 749 610 820 2

GIULIANO SMITH

WPNS LOAD 235 235 6421 WPNS LOAD 2763 MAINT 638



Preceding spread The daily point totals are watched closely by all teams during the ten days of Gunsmoke

This page Maintenance crewmen attached to the 419th TFW, Air Force Reserve, previous repeat winners of Gunsmoke. The reservists had to settle for second place in 1987



The pilot head of a 31st TFW F-16
gets a final polish before a
Gunsmoke inspection



From front to back: the same
polisher shines the con/di nozzle of
the P&W F100-200 turbofan



Custom intake covers are hand-made especially for the Gunsmoke competition. This tasteful effort is from the reservists of the 419th TFW at Hill AFB



Air Force Reserve F-16s out of Hill
AFB, Ogden, Utah shine prior to
inspection by the Gunsmoke judges



F-16 crew chief salutes his pilot as
the jet heads out to the Gunsmoke
range

A C-9 Nightingale hospital ship of
the Military airlift Command makes
an evening landing at Nellis



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